

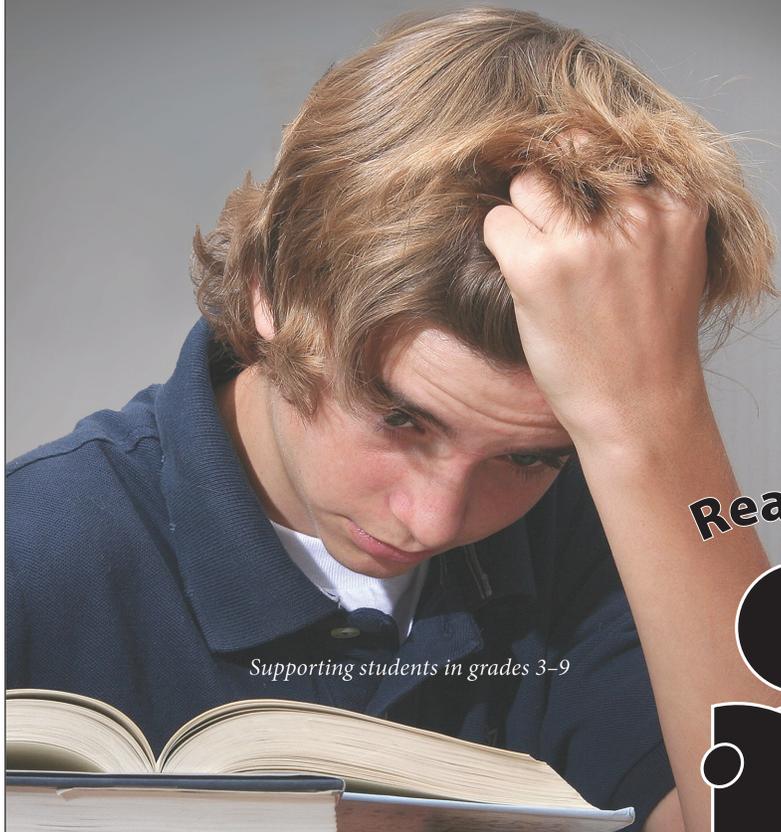
Small Group Instruction

Pembroke's Friday Freebie

STRUGGLING READERS

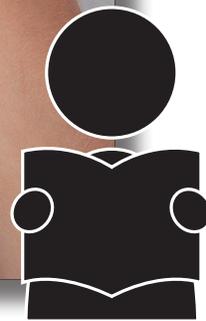
Why Band-aids Don't Stick and Worksheets Don't Work

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Supporting students in grades 3-9

Reading



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What Does Small-Group Instruction Look Like?

Small-group reading instruction means different things to different people. In some cases, the term *guided reading* connotes a very specific structure for instruction; however, I like to think of guided reading as a small-group structure that includes whatever types of instruction, support, and scaffolded practice the students need in order to become better readers. This usually means minimizing teaching time and maximizing students' reading time. In a small-group guided reading session, we want students to achieve two main things: to build the competencies of good readers and to understand and appreciate text.

Here are some guidelines for small-group reading instruction:

1. Keep the lessons short and focused

A 20-minute time frame is adequate to address one or two specific learning goals, dig into an appropriate text, and keep the students engaged. After all, we're going to go back and read that text again. If we want to make the most of those 20 minutes, we need to make sure that our lessons are carefully planned and focused on a specific goal or concept, to have all resources at hand, and to set a timer! If the timer goes before the lesson plan is accomplished, leave the rest of the lesson for another day.

2. Choose short texts that are engaging and accessible

In Chapter 1, we addressed choosing texts that are just a little bit challenging for the students, texts that have them *standing on their tiptoes* as readers, for small-group instruction. Texts should be short enough to be read in one sitting and to be revisited over subsequent sessions. Entire novels are generally not appropriate for small-group guided reading. For one thing, the kind of close reading and rereading of the text done in small-group instruction would make a novel study tedious and tiring. Moreover, literary novels usually have peaks and valleys in their level of difficulty, with some chapters too difficult for your students and others too easy. However, carefully chosen excerpts or individual chapters of novels can be excellent texts for small-group reading, and sometimes the lesson will provide enough support for the students to read other sections on their own.

3. Revisit the same text two or three times

The research on repeated reading suggests that, if we want students to think and comprehend deeply, a text has to be read more than once (Thierren, 2004). For a challenging text, the first reading simply enables the reader to make sense of the print and get the gist of the passage. Subsequent readings build comprehension and fluency; they enable us to dive more deeply into the content of the text, to think more critically, and to appreciate the author's craft. I like to have students read each passage at least three times, which means spending at least two or three sessions—and sometimes more—on the same piece of text.

4. Introduce texts carefully

Text introductions have recently received some bad press in the literacy world (Pearson, 2013). Certainly, spending more time preparing to read a text than actually reading it is ineffective practice, but some form of text introduction is particularly important for struggling readers. These students need guidance in applying appropriate background knowledge to making meaning, in setting pur-

Three Ps of Prereading

- **Preview the Text**
- **Activate Prior Knowledge**
- **Set a Purpose for Reading**

poses for reading and adjusting their reading to those purposes. Previewing a text before reading not only supports this practice, but is also one of the habits of highly effective readers.

The text introduction should be brief and intentional, and it should support essential reading habits. I use a quick, three-part introduction: preview the text, activate prior knowledge, and set a purpose for reading. Setting a purpose helps us take a stance as readers and guides us in knowing how to approach the reading; for example, we will approach the text quite differently if we know it's intended to make us laugh than if we know it's intended to teach a complex concept. The length of the text introduction will vary according to the challenges of the text and the amount of background knowledge students will need, but I try to keep it as brief as possible. Planning my text introduction ahead of time helps me make the most of the brief 20-minute session.

5. Have students read individually and silently

During small-group instruction, students should have their own copies of the text and be reading to themselves, except when instructed to read for the teacher. As my students read silently, I tap the book of one student at a time, indicating that the student should read aloud in a soft voice for my ears only. I only need to listen for 15 or 20 seconds to know how a student is coping with the text before moving on to the next student.

No reader—especially a struggling reader—should be asked to read publicly without having an opportunity to rehearse first. On subsequent rereadings, I will ask students to read sections aloud, but always with a purpose for both the reader and the listeners. Because students are reading silently, we read only short chunks of text before stopping to discuss both the content of the text and the reading process.

6. Provide lots of opportunities for literate talk about text

Literate talk refers to discussion that requires students to analyze characters, interpret events, draw inferences, make comparisons and contrasts, read critically, and generally think more deeply about text. During a 20-minute small-group reading lesson, there isn't much time for writing, but there should be lots of time for discussion that helps students to think more deeply and critically about what they've read and to be more metacognitive about the processes they have used as readers.

As part of my lesson planning, I predetermine “pause points” in the reading, and prepare questions and prompts that will guide students to interpret the text and extend their thinking to higher levels.

7. Plan a follow-up task

Even the most finely executed lesson will be wasted if the students never apply what they've learned to reading on their own. *Must-do* tasks generally entail more reading and/or writing to practice a strategy, reinforce a new concept, or extend the experience with the text. Of course, must-do tasks are always linked to the specific learning goals of the lesson, but might include routines like the following:

- Read another section of text and track thinking with sticky notes
- Take turns reading aloud with a partner to build fluency
- Play a game that involves vocabulary development or a word-solving strategy, such as building words with prefixes and suffixes.
- Complete a graphic organizer or other written response

The Guided Reading Lesson Planner

Making the most of limited time with a small group requires careful planning and organization.

Three-Day Lesson Cycle

Day 1: Testing the Waters: Introduce the text and have students read it independently to get the gist of it.

Day 2: Diving Deeper: Do a closer reading of the text to focus on interpreting content, building metacognition, and reading critically.

Day 3: Dipping Back In: Skim, scan, or closely reread the text to focus on vocabulary, word-solving, fluency, and writer's craft.

The planner shown here uses a three-day lesson cycle. Reading on the first day is like dipping a toe in a pool to get the temperature; i.e., it is generally dedicated to introducing the text and “first-draft” reading. In texts that stretch a reader, the first reading often enables us just to navigate the print and get a sense of what it's all about. If we want to understand more thoroughly, we usually need to read it again. Therefore, on the second day, we dive more deeply into the text to talk about what the author has said and how he/she has said it. We might reread with a focus on one or more comprehension strategies. Finally, on a third reading, we dip back into certain sections of the text to practice word-solving strategies, to reread for fluency, to focus on text features, or to analyze literary elements.

The Small-Group Lesson Planner on page 24 is a lesson planning template that you can use to set goals for instruction, prepare a text introduction, and plan a three-day cycle of instruction, guided reading, and must-do practice.

Sample Small-Group Lesson Cycle

The text used for the sample lesson cycle on page 23 is Chapter 1 from *Ghost House* by Paul Kropp; see Appendix A, pages 142–143 for excerpted pages. The reading level of this chapter (and the entire book) is mid-Grade 3.

Sample Lesson Plan

<p>Learning Focus</p> <p>Comprehension: Drawing inferences about characters</p> <p>Word/Language Study: Apostrophes for possessives and contractions</p>	<p>Text</p> <p><i>Ghost House, Chapter 1</i></p>
<p>Preview: <i>This is a book about three boys who dare each other to spend the night in an old house that they think is haunted.</i></p> <p>Prior Knowledge: <i>TTYN (Talk to your Neighbor) about what story elements you might expect to find in a book about a haunted house.</i></p> <p>Purpose: <i>We know that there are three ways we learn about characters when we read: from what the author says directly about them, from what they say and do, and from what others say to and about them. In this chapter, we learn about the four main characters: Tyler, Zach, AJ, Hammy. As you read, think about each of the characters. At the end, we're going to talk about what we know about each character—and how we learned about them.</i></p>	
<p>Day 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Book introduction - Read pages 3–4 aloud while students follow. Talk about what has been learned about the characters so far and how this information is conveyed. (Zach: little brother; Hammy: good skateboarder; Tyler: big brother, smart mouth, not afraid; AJ: real name Alexander; All four characters: like to laugh, friends, hang out together.) Create a character chart, sorted as <i>In the Book</i> (literal) and <i>In My Head</i> (inferential). Require students to find evidence in the text. - Put a stop sign at the end of page 7 and have students read silently. (Teacher taps on a student's book as a signal for that student to raise his/her voice, and listens to each student in turn for a few seconds.) - Stop and talk: <i>What can we add to the character chart?</i> 	<p>Must-Do</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finish reading the chapter. - Create your own character chart from paper folded in half with columns labeled <i>In the Book/In My Head</i>. Jot 2–3 things learned about each of the three main characters.
<p>Day 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Revisit must-do task. Be sure students understand the difference between a trait (good skateboarder) and evidence from the text (“Hammy did a 180 ollie that looked pretty slick.”). Add new ideas to the group character chart. - Review the characteristics of good oral reading: volume, expression, phrasing, pacing. Have students reread the chapter aloud in pairs, taking turns reading half-pages; listen in on individual students and take anecdotal notes. - Discuss: <i>What do you think of the dare? Are the stakes equal? Which characters do you predict will stay in the house? Why do you think so?</i> 	<p>Must-Do</p> <p>Create a Venn diagram to compare the characters of Tyler and Hammy.</p>
<p>Day 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Invite students to read their must-do responses aloud. - Language/Word study: apostrophes. Have students scan the text for examples of words with apostrophes and use highlighting tape to mark them. Create a chart labeled <i>Possessives</i> and <i>Contractions</i> to sort the words. - Discussion: <i>How do you think the boys should prepare for the night in the haunted house? What should they do to let someone know where they are in case something happens to them?</i> 	<p>Must-Do</p> <p>Extended Response: As Tyler, write a note to your mom, explaining what you are doing and why you feel you have to do it. Your response should have three parts:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) where you are going to be overnight 2) why you decided to stay overnight in the haunted house 3) why she shouldn't be angry with you

Small-Group Lesson Planner

Learning Focus	Text
Preview: Prior Knowledge: Purpose:	
Day 1	Must-Do
Day 2	Must-Do
Day 3	Must-Do